

Committee on Appropriations

Public Hearing February 11, 2020

Testimony of Bobby Asher and Aleta Staton, on behalf of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas

Since the founding of the [International Festival of Arts & Ideas](#) in 1996, our partnership with the State of Connecticut has touched many lives and brought much needed dollars to New Haven and our State. This testimony is intended to thank the legislature for your ongoing support and to share information about Arts & Ideas' impact made possible through this funding.

The economic results are well documented and quantifiable. Thanks to a long-standing relationship with Quinnipiac University who has overseen an independent economic impact study each year of the Festival, we can confidently measure our direct and indirect economic impact. Over the course of just 15 days, we generated an economic impact of \$9.2 million in 2019 and generated \$584,693 in sales tax. We also employ more than 180 people each summer and draw tens-of-thousands of people to Downtown New Haven, maintaining the city's vibrancy during otherwise-slow summer months. Finally, the International Festival of Arts & Ideas provides paid opportunities for artists and speakers from Connecticut. In 2019, 672 Connecticut-based speakers and artists were featured on our stages (representing 75% of speakers and artists overall).

We are one of the only institutions of our kind in the world that offers such a breadth and depth of programming free-of-cost, ensuring that every person in Connecticut who has the desire to attend will be welcomed without barriers. Because more than 85% of our performances and activities are free to the community, we depend on both public and private funding. The State of Connecticut's support provides the foundation of this critical infrastructure that ensures the year-long strength of our organization. We steward these funds with the utmost respect and diligence, with gold standard fiscal management confirmed through annual state single audits. We also recognize that we cannot depend solely on the State to fund our work; through earned revenue and fundraising we match each public dollar approximately 4-to-1 with private revenue.

Beyond dollar-and-cents, the International Festival of Arts & Ideas is proud of our work in the community and for the community. Because of length constraints, we would like to focus on one program that we are particularly proud of: the Arts & Ideas High School Fellowship Program. Each year for the past ten years, we have welcomed 10-18 New Haven Public School sophomores and juniors together for an intensive, semester-long course that develops their critical thinking and writing skills and introduces them to the inner-workings of the non-profit arts industry. Thanks to a unique partnership with Gateway Community College, students gain invaluable exposure to the college environment and earn four college credits—oftentimes inspiring them to continue to participate in the middle college program and setting them up for long-term academic success. Students also rave about the program, sharing that it taught them “how to collaborate with others that have different ideas than you.”

On behalf of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas' staff and the Board of Directors we sincerely thank you for your past years of support and congratulate the legislature on the results we generated together for our State.